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## The colors of *umuri masã* in the brushstrokes of Feliciano Lana

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Justino SARMENTO REZENDE (Tuyuka), Silvio SANCHES BARRETO (Bará),  
and João Paulo LIMA BARRETO (Tukano),  
text compiled and revised by Gilton MENDES DOS SANTOS,  
translated by Glenn SHEPARD



Fig. 1 – Feliciano Lana (Gustavo Soranz, 2020)

For the indigenous peoples of the northwest Amazon, when someone leaves this world, a farewell ceremony takes place. The villagers join the family of the deceased to cry, out loud and full-throated, over the departure of the dead person. In this collective mourning, the person's qualities are pointed out, such as their treatment of the family, their participation in the life of the village, their joy, ability to tell jokes, work ethic, willingness to help people, and so on.

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The Dessana artist Feliciano Lana traveled from this to another world. People who knew him closely, those who knew of his artistic work, or simply those who had heard about him all mourned together, facilitated by the speed with which the news reached the social networks.

Feliciano Pimentel Lana was born in the village of São João Batista on the Rio Tiquié on the upper Rio Negro of Amazonas state, Brazil, in 1937. He studied at the Salesian boarding school in Pari-Cachoeira district, married Joaquina Machado Tukano, and moved to the regional capital of São Gabriel da Cachoeira in the mid-1990s. He passed away on May 12, 2020, at his home in the village of São Francisco, on the upper Rio Negro, a victim of cardiopulmonary arrest attributed to Covid-19.

This tribute is a joint work prepared by members of the Dessana, Yepamasa (Tukano), ʼĪtāpinopona (Tuyuka), and Bará peoples. We are all graduate students in Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Amazonas (UFAM)

and associate researchers at the Center for the Study of Indigenous Amazonia (NEAI).

Feliciano Lana, both his person and his work, represents a symbolic and cultural treasure that must be perpetuated for generations. It is up to us, the descendants of the indigenous peoples of the northwestern Amazon, to inform our peoples while at the same time thrilling at our cultural knowledge and unique abilities, as Feliciano Lana did.

\* \* \*

**Mahsa Buâri Pahti**

*Ahte hori merã arĩ yūkaweri  
wĩrũ mahkũ heriporã bahseke  
merã piisunoũ arĩ Sibé (Feliciano  
Lana), Torãmũ Kẽhori Porã kũũ  
mahsabuãdiakã. Ahtiro nĩsetirã  
parãmi nĩkũ buhtidiami niigũma,  
mũsarẽ, ahto kãrõ bahpakioke-  
oti. Üsã wirã porã ũkũsetiro  
merã. Ũmũkori Mahsa, pamũati*



Fig. 2 – The world of emergence  
(Jaime Diakara, 2020)

*dihporore, ümüse pahtipü niĩgũ. Ahte wiorẽ amotikũpũ, wiõ wiĩ wegũ ahte kahsere tüõñari mahsu niĩpũ, tehgũ ahte bahsese bahsĩgũpũ ari niĩsame wiõ mahsu niĩma. Pamũka behroma ahte gahpi burẽõrama, tehẽ mahsã uhpũko gahpidari siĩrĩgũ, ahte gahpi hori buãpeakãtiporo, tere ñaãdiokũ, wãkũnũrõta, behro ahti mari katiri pahtiperema, ahtirota buãpũ niĩ horikũmũãpũ, bahsamori hori, wũmati hori, uhpũ hori, bahsabohta wiĩ hori, kumũ hori. Ahtere hori buhsartigũ mahsũniĩsamiarĩ Ümũkori Mahsa. Ahtokãterore ahtero kiosa mari. Ahtiro niĩsetirã niĩsa marĩã niĩkũ yũpahkũmi.*

## The world of emergence

Before the appearance of the world, the *Umukori Masa* (“People of the Universe,” i.e. Dessana) lived on the celestial level. Their main cosmic vehicle was *wihõ* (*Virola*) snuff. When practicing the *wihõ* ceremony, they acquired knowledge about the world. In this way, the Wihõ Divinity taught the *base*se (“blessings”) to the Dessana. After the Dessana emerged, there came the Pamuri Mahsa, the tribes who traveled in the Canoe of Transformation. They created the *caapi* (ayahuasca) beverage, which they sipped together with the Dessana and thus had access to the world of colors and graphic designs. Together, they deeply probed the world in which we live. For this reason, they are the original authors of the graphic designs and colors used in ritual ceremonies, in body paint, and on the pillars of the longhouse. Through this original mythical tradition, we inherited this knowledge. So my father told me.

## Mahsa Diã pahti

*Torãmũ Kẽhori Porã arĩ Sibẽ (Feliciano) kũũ ñekũsumĩ miĩpĩrãko pohtepũ, boãnũkakũ parãmi, tohpũ bahsari wehkeãpũ. Tehgũ naã yã kurama naã mahsami makũ niĩkũ. Yũma*



Fig. 3 – The world of waters  
(Jaime Diakara, 2020)

*yüü pahkü ahkabi mahkü niikümi niimi. Ahrã pahíya hêase merã, warasakopé piânükã mahka pããheãkarã niima arã naã Torãmü Kêhori Porã niĩ ùküma. Arĩ Sibé bukiãtuheáguma, ahtirota wiĩmũ niĩgũ, mükü uhpüri yũ pahküre ñaã, ùküse tüô wehgũ. Kihti küü tüökere meô horikũ yüsa niĩgüma, hori ñakükãakü niĩwĩma, arã niĩsama, naã buküürã ùküürã niĩgüma. Papera pürĩpü kihti woã tehẽ watero, ahte buküürã kihti, waimahsa kihti, yuküdüka mahsa kihti wehkükü niĩwĩma. Musa dahragü, arã pehkãsäpea, ahtiro dahragüma wiopesaro ñamana niĩgüma yüma tohó wiogü merã, ùküwũ mühsare wehta mügü wekãmikü, dehro niĩ wãküti mühsa niĩ serĩñawũ, yüü tonikã tüörã, mahkã dehko musa do lago nirô parãma nãrẽ Feliciano wãkuãpa niĩwĩ, wãemere küña niĩwũ. Tohó niĩkã tüörãma küü dahreke hẽõpeonowüma. Ahte küü dahrakere ahti pahtikãrãre küdiãmima. Tehgü ahte horire mahsãdiã tüñarô merã wegü weãpü. Yüü pahkü wãkügũ, yũ pahkü mahsa diã tüõñagü nãã mahsĩse merã naã buhtidiãka.*

## The world of waters

Feliciano Lana is traditionally known by the name Sibé. He is a descendant of the ancestor Torãmü Kêhori, who came originally from Açaí Lake, where his ceremonial longhouse was located, according to my people, the Dessana. Sibé is the son of my father's younger brother. When the missionaries arrived in the upper Rio Negro region, my father's grandparents made a village on Wará Lake (*wará* is an edible fruit), and the descendants of Torãmü Kêhori still live there today. Sibé apprenticed for a while under my father, Diakaru, and he later transformed this knowledge into drawings and paintings. He drew and also wrote about our ancestors, about the *Waimasa* ("Fish Beings"), the landscapes, the animals and the fruits. When I worked at MUSA, the Museum of the Amazon, located on the outskirts of the city of Manaus, I realized that visitors valued Dessana art. So when they opened a new MUSA headquarters in the city center, I suggested that Sibé exhibit his work there. He accepted my suggestion, and today we share in the joy of having the work of Dessana artist Feliciano Lana exhibited at MUSA. Sibé left us this legacy, and that is why my drawing (above) reminds me of his story and pays homage to him. I made the drawing thinking about my father, who passed away last year. With my writing and drawings, I intend to continue the art of my people, the heritage I received from my ancestors, the cosmic origin of my ancestors, and the legacy left by my kinsman Sibé.

Jaime Diakara

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The Salesian Missionary boarding school at Pari-Cachoeira on the Tiquié River, a tributary of the Uaupés, brought together children of various ethnic



groups throughout the region at the culmination of their school education. The curriculum was similar to that of non-indigenous schools in town. In addition to school studies, the priests trained indigenous people in carpentry, cabinet making, tailoring, mechanics, teaching, catechism work and also as community “captains” or leaders. Some of those who did not continue their studies or go on to technical training chose, or had no other choice but, to undergo traditional apprenticeships and became recognized as *basegu* (shamans) or *baya* (ceremonial masters).

And yet even those who studied or received technical training had a difficult time finding employment in the region, leading them back to learning *basera* traditional knowledge and perpetuating the life and experiences of the Pamurimahsã and Umukohori Masã peoples. Eventually, some school graduates were able to travel to different towns throughout the region and to more distant cities in other Brazilian states and also abroad.

At around the same time, anthropologists began to appear in the region, doing the kind of documentation that previously had been done only by missionaries in their descriptions, notes, reports, and other records. As Feliciano Lana was a former resident of the Salesian mission, I suspect that he acquired some notions about drawing and painting in the non-indigenous style there. With time, and with the encouragement of different interlocutors, he improved his skill in drawing and painting techniques. I never had the opportunity to talk to him in person; I just heard about him and enjoyed his works, displayed in various places. But remembering the legacy of our stories about the “People of the Universe,” I have come to understand that through his paintings, Feliciano Lana managed to reveal and express the existence and resistance of indigenous knowledge systems, of a world of meanings beyond the scope of understanding the so-called “civilized” people.

Dagoberto Azevedo

\* \* \*

The indigenous peoples of the northwestern Amazon, by means of one of their descendants, or *kenhiporã*, “Children of the Dream Drawings,” have built bridges of communication from this remote region, known by different names such as *Amuarã/Akoãra Dihtara* (“Ornamental Fish Lake”), *Waraserako* (Wará Fruit Lake), and São João Batista, to diverse cultural and academic centers of Brazil and throughout the world. Feliciano Lana is one of the heirs of the knowledge of our peoples. With his life and his departure to another existential level, he has left his work and his art to us, those who are still alive, and for future generations.

Now, I imagine that he must have accessed the world of the *kapidoharã*, the agents of ayahuasca (*caapi*). They are the ones who, on the metaphysical plane, are able to talk to serpents, borrowing their colors and body designs. These colors and designs emerge in the liquid from the *caapi*, and are accessed by the men who drink it. Depending on how the *caapi* is prepared, they will see the different colors of the world, of the *maloca* (longhouse), of music and of the ancestor anaconda in their *kapibahuase*, “dreams caused by *caapi*.” They will see the pillars of the longhouse transform into snakes and talk to them. The pillars, beams, and thatch of the longhouse speak in the voice of our ancestors.

Our *bayaroa*, masters of dance, *kumua*, ceremonial masters, and other men who drink *caapi* to seek inspiration before a festival paint the designs and colors they see in their visions on the pillars of the longhouse, on the dance staffs, on the ceremonial stools, on rattles, on drinking gourds, on maracas and flutes. They use red and black paint to decorate the face and bodies of men and women. These colors are also found in the different types of clay (red, yellow, blue, white), in the shades of the birds’ feathers (green, blue, red, black, yellow, brown), in the color of fish, in the designs of woven baskets and basins.

In his life trajectory, as a member of the People of the Universe and the Children of the Dream Drawings, Feliciano Lana learned this knowledge from the teachings of his ancestors. Walking through different places where he left his footprints, he also accessed other kinds of knowledge. His brief time at the Salesian boarding school in Pari-Cachoeira did not prevent him from continuing to live by these teachings, because his Dessana education had been solid. At boarding school, he saw other young people learning to draw and paint by imitating the drawings in school textbooks. However, at the time it was not common to produce drawings based on indigenous culture.

Feliciano Lana was given encouragement as he began producing drawings in this other direction. I don’t know all of them, but I would like to point out three people who I believe supported him. The first was Fr. Kazys Jurgis Béksta, “Brother Casimiro” (1924-2015), a Salesian of Lithuanian origin who carried out extensive studies among Dessana and authored in 1988 a book entitled *A Maloca Tukano-Dessana e seu simbolismo* (*The Tukano-Dessana Longhouse and Its Symbolism*). The second was anthropologist Dominique Buchillet (1951-2018), who devoted much of her research time and activities to that community. The third was anthropologist Berta Ribeiro (1924-1997), who had worked among the Dessana even earlier. Feliciano Lana and his brother Luis Lana were helped along by the enthusiasm and dedication of these anthropologists who worked among the Dessana. They not only employed Feliciano and Luis as translators and informants, but also collaborated with them as authors of their own publications.

Feliciano Lana dedicated himself to his skill as an artist, draftsman, and painter. His works express the history of the peoples of the northwestern Amazon. His drawings tell of our ancestry and resilience, expressed in different colors and revealing themselves in the forms of the Anaconda Canoe, fish, birds, jaguars, longhouses, ceremonial instruments, traditional dances, and other subjects. They show the connection between the human world and the worlds of other beings. Feliciano's paintings express how he imagines the world and its different beings as narrated by his grandparents. His work was done naturally, since there was no "teacher" to control him or tell him to improve some detail or do this or that differently. He generated works of art fertilized by the culture of many peoples of the northwestern Amazon. He revealed to the academy and to the world a new way of organizing and transmitting knowledge.

His life trajectory, his art, his drawings and paintings inspire us to explore knowledge beyond pre-determined schemes. His art helps us to think in new ways, to create original forms of expression of the knowledge of our peoples. For us, as indigenous students of anthropology and other disciplines, his legacy makes us imagine new ways of organizing and presenting our work. For this reason, the legacy left by Feliciano Lana is inspiring. The traces of his hands are still alive in our existence.

Justino Sarmento Rezende

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It is an honor for me to talk about Feliciano Lana, who he was, and what he represents in terms of knowledge about the indigenous universe for new generations. He's not just another person who has passed on. I acknowledge my limitations in speaking in detail about our late Dessana relative, but I'll record a few crooked lines here. Long before I, or rather long before we, the indigenous anthropologists from the Eastern Tukano linguistic family, began our studies, our ancestors had already developed a methodology for building oral knowledge through different art forms, including drawing and painting. In the past, our fathers and grandfathers would gather late into the night to talk, chew *ipadu* (coca powder), smoke tobacco, and share knowledge. They passed on the knowledge of what they had learned from other wise men. I imagine the auspicious moments of knowledge passed on from father to son, while they are warming up by the fire, fishing, walking along the path to the swidden garden or at the moment of picking coca leaves. Whenever there is an interruption, it is the end of the conversation and the end of the transmission. I am sure that Feliciano Lana had the opportunity to receive such kinds of transmission, which he knew very well how to express in his work. From what we know of our ancestors and our specialists (*kumú*, *bayá*, and *yaî*), art has been expressed since the creation of the world in body ornaments, painting on the walls of



the ritual house, longhouse pillars, musical instruments, and in face and body painting. But it was this artist from among the “Children of the Universe,” the Dessana people, who pioneered this art form, using this new idiom to transmit knowledge. I am sure that Feliciano Lana is now richly ornamented in the House of the Universe, where he was received by his ancestors. Here, uncle, I leave these crooked lines in your honor, from your nephew, *Wa’î pino pona Mahú*.

Silvio Sanches Barreto

\* \* \*

I got to know Sibé (Feliciano Lana) during my childhood in Pari Cachoeira district during religious festivities like Christmas, Easter, celebrations for Don Bosco and Our Lady of Good Help, and the national remembrance of Independence Day on September 7. Such holidays were times when the entire population of the region joined together to commemorate. I remember that Feliciano Lana was very close to my father, because I often saw them talking when they ran into each other in the halls of the boarding school or on the town streets.

When they met, they talked mostly about serious matters, without elaborations or jokes. It was a relationship between brothers-in-law, determined by affinal kinship rules, and therefore conducted with respect and care in the forms of speech. Accompanying my parents, I perceived Feliciano Lana as a calm gentleman with a serene voice and a discreet smile.

After spending my childhood in Pari-Cachoeira, I left the district to continue my studies in Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state, and other cities. I never saw Sibé again. He also ended up leaving the district, coming to live in the municipal capital of São Gabriel da Cachoeira because of the new economic-political-social configuration.

Later, I started to hear news of him indirectly through his work, his drawings, his books, and acknowledgments and citations to his work in dissertations and academic theses. Then, for the past 11 years, I began to have more direct contact with his *kahpihori* (images).

Imagine yourself entering the Amazonian Museum, in Manaus, to visit an exhibition of Sibé’s drawings. Photographs of his drawings are displayed in a logical sequence according to the *kihtiukuse* (mythical narratives of origin) of some indigenous peoples of the Upper Rio Negro. Right at the entrance is a picture of the Giant Anaconda, with a man standing on its head holding a staff. The snake navigates an immense river, surrounded by beaches and forests under a cloud-covered sky. Some parts of the anaconda’s body are painted with small window divisions, where the crew of future humans can be seen. Further on in the exhibit, there is another painting showing two birds flying

and carrying a child in a hammock. In the background, among the clouds, there is a longhouse surrounded by a small ring of forest. The rest of the picture is filled by the waters of a long river and an immense forest. Further on, there is another painting, a snake decorated with designs along its body swallowing a person. And so on, a series of paintings are paraded on the museum walls.

For someone who is unfamiliar with the meaning of these paintings, or who doesn't have an informed guide, you could easily fall into the interpretation that the pictures represent the imagination or dreams, or admire them as expressions of the "spirit" of the artist. Someone familiar with these images, however, sees these pictures and realizes that they are dealing with the *kihtiukuse*, the mythical narratives of the indigenous peoples of the upper Rio Negro, more specifically the peoples called Pamurimahsã. Thus, these *kahpihori* (drawings) take an appreciative audience to the universe of the *kihtiukuse* (mythical narratives), to *bahsese* (the art of blessing) and *bahsamori* (ceremonial sequences). In this way, Sibé's drawings are not mere representations of an imaginary or dream world, but rather an effort to inscribe a native theory. Thus the drawings take on the deepest sense of *kahpihori*.

Indigenous masters of the Upper Rio Negro call all graphic records *kahpihori*, including the artwork engraved on stones along the Amazon, Rio Negro, and Uaupes in places called *Pamuri Wiseri*, or "Sacred Houses." *Kahpihori* are also expressed on the walls and columns of collective houses, on basketry, on ornaments, and on bodies. Our sages say that they are the key to access metaphysical reality, which usually happens during *kahpi* sessions, in special sessions of *wiõ* (*Virola* snuff), and during the training period of apprentices. Therefore, Feliciano Lana's *kahpihori* are not simply drawings, nor are they simple drawings. Behind them is an indigenous theory about the emergence of the terrestrial world, humans, landscapes, rivers, fish, and all other animals and types of beings.

In addition to this significant content, these drawings carry elements considered vital by the healing and ritual specialists of the upper Rio Negro, as they show a set of social practices, rules, categories, and formal speech acts during the ceremonies. These elements are also ingredients of *bahsese* formulas ("blessings") for the construction of the person, the care of the body, and quality of life.

With his unmistakable style, Feliciano Lana was truly a *Kahpihorimahsu* ("Image-Being"), as he endeavored to share an entire complex of indigenous knowledge in a language accessible to a non-specialist audience, in short, to the world of non-indigenous people. He inscribed this complex knowledge about the upper Rio Negro in the form of drawings. For this reason, he occupies an important place as ambassador of the indigenous world. Through the idiom of apparently simple drawings—sometimes thought to be naïve, child-like, without aesthetic-academic rigor—he has developed on paper an entire native theory

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for a larger audience which has yet to understand the depth of his work. For all these reasons, I dare to call Feliciano Lana *Kahpihorimahsu*, “Image-Being.”

On this occasion, I would also like to pay tribute to all the other *Kahpihorimahsã* who are alive, including my friend Torãmũ (Jaime Diakara), who also contributed to this text.

João Paulo Lima Barreto



Fig. 4 – Feliciano Lana (Gustavo Soranz, 2020)